

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 ACDA-12 OES-07 DLOS-09 EB-08 AID-05 TRSE-00
OMB-01 AF-10 /141 W
-----051634 252026Z /50

P 251935Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0981
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CH, UR, PBOR
SUBJECT: SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

REF: (A) 76 MOSCOW 19075, (B) PEKING 1114, (C) MOSCOW 6302,
(D) MOSCOW 8568

SUMMARY: CHINESE DIPLOMAT HERE CONFIRMED TO EMBOFF THAT IL'ICHEV IS GOING TO PEKING (HE CLAIMED AT SOVIET INITIATIVE) BUT EXPRESSED SKEPTICISM ON PROSPECTS FOR THE BORDER TALKS. HE ALSO INDICATED THAT CHINESE CENTRAL AUTHORITIES WERE NOT AWARE OF THE "ACCIDENTAL" SENKAKU INCURSIONS MADE BY "LOCAL" CHINESE FISHERMEN, STRESSED THAT THE SENKAKU INCIDENT WILL NOT IMPEDE POSITIVE TREND IN SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS; AND CHARGED THAT MOSCOW IS BLOCKING IMPROVEMENT IN CHINESE RELATIONS WITH EE COUNTRIES. BY SENDING IL'ICHEV ON ANOTHER ONE OF HIS PERIODIC VISITS TO PEKING, MOSCOW MAY BE HOPING TO:

--GIVE SOME SUPPORT TO ANY POSSIBLE SENTIMENT FOR IMPROVING SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS THAT MAY EXIST IN THE DIVIDED CHINESE LEADERSHIP, TO PROBE FOR NEW INFORMATION ABOUT DEVELOPMENTS IN CHINA AND, GENERALLY "TO KEEP THE LINES OPEN" TO SENIOR PRC LEVELS.

--DISSUADE THE WEST FROM BECOMING OVER-CONFIDENT ABOUT ITS ABILITY TO EXPLOIT SINO-SOVIET DIFFERENCES FOR ITS OWN ENDS, PARTICULARLY AT A TIME WHEN A DELAYED SALT AGREEMENT AND SOVIET INTERVENTION IN AFRICA HAVE STRAINED US-SOVIET RELATIONS.

--TO GIVE SOME PAUSE TO THE APPARENT WORSENING TREND IN SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS.
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WE BELIEVE THAT MOSCOW HAS THESE POSSIBLE "BENEFITS" IN MIND IN DECIDING TO SEND IL'ICHEV TO PEKING NOW AND DOUBT WHETHER HIS BRIEF INCLUDES ANY SIGNIFICANT NEW SOVIET PROPOSALS FOR SOLVING THE BORDER DISPUTE - PARTICULARLY AFTER THE APRIL 1 PRAVDA ARTICLE'S REITERATION OF MOSCOW'S UNYIELDING POSITION ON THE BORDER ISSUE.
END SUMMARY.

1. IL'ICHEV TO PEKING: PRC EMBASSY FIRST SECRETARY LI TUNG-CHENG CONFIRMED TO EMBOFF APRIL 24 THAT SOVIET DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER IL'ICHEV WILL BE GOING TO PEKING. LI AVOIDED ANSWERING A DIRECT QUESTION ON EXACTLY WHEN -IL'ICHEV WILL LEAVE MOSCOW FOR PEKING, BUT HE STATED THAT VISIT IS SOLELY AT SOVIET INITIATIVE.

2. LI WAS VERY NEGATIVE ON SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS IN GENERAL AND EXPRESSED SKEPTICISM ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR PROGRESS IN THE BORDER TALKS DURING IL'ICHEV'S VISIT TO PEKING. HE STRONGLY REITERATED CHINESE STEADFASTNESS ON THE CONCEPT OF SOVIET ACCEPTANCE OF THE EXISTENCE OF "DISPUTED AREAS". HE CRITICIZED THE SOVIETS FOR

EXAGGERATING AND DISTORTING "DISPUTED AREAS" TO INCLUDE
ALLEGED CHINESE DEMANDS FOR THE LARGER TERRITORIES TAKEN
BY THE SOVIET UNION THROUGH THE UNEQUAL TREATIES. HE
SAID THAT THE "DISPUTED AREAS" ARE ONLY THOSE AREAS WHICH
THE SOVIETS SEIZED AFTER THE UNEQUAL TREATIES AND WHICH
BOTH SIDES NOW CLAIM. HE MENTIONED SPECIFICALLY THE
"WESTERN BORDER" AREA PRESUMABLY THE PAMU AREA NORTH OF
AFGANISTAN AND SOUTH OF THE KIZIL JIK DAWAN PASS, AND
TERRITORY SOUTH OF THE CONFLUENCE OF THE AMUR AND USSURI
RIVERS (CHIMNAYA/HEI-HSIA-TZU ISLAND AREA). HE STATED
THAT THE CHINESE EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED VIRTUALLY NO

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OMB-01 AF-10 /141 W
-----051696 252027Z /50

P 251935Z APR 78

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0982
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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INDICATION FROM THE SOVIETS ON WHETHER IL'ICHEV WOULD BE TAKING ANY NEW PROPOSALS TO PEKING. HE WAS RELUCTANT TO SPECULATE ON SOVIET MOTIVES IN SENDING IL'ICHEV TO PEKING NOW. LI ALSO JOKED ABOUT THE PAST HISTORY OF PERIODIC IL'ICHEV VISITS TO PEKING WHICH PRODUCED NO CHANGES IN THE SOVIET POSITION AND NO PROGRESS ON THE BORDER TALKS.

2. SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS AND THE SENKAKU INCIDENT: LI GENERALLY FOLLOWED PRC LINE REPORTED REFTEL B. HE DESCRIBED CHINESE INCURSIONS INTO SENKAKU WATERS AS "ACCIDENTAL". HE INDICATED THAT THESE INCURSIONS WERE MADE BY "LOCAL" FISHERMEN WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHINESE CENTRAL AUTHORITIES AND THAT NO POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE SHOULD BE ATTACHED TO THEM. HE STRESSED THAT THE SENKAKU INCIDENT WILL NOT IMPEDE THE POSITIVE TREND IN SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS, DESPITE, HE JOKED, WHAT ONE READS IN THE SOVIET PRESS. HE LAMENTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE INCIDENT HAS GIVEN AMMUNITION TO PFT CRITICS IN JAPAN EVEN THOUGH THE TREATY WILL EVENTUALLY BE SIGNED ANYWAY. BOTH SIDES HAD AGREED AT THE TIME OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS THAT A SOLUTION TO THE SENKAKU PROBLEM SHOULD BE POSTPONED. GOOD WILL HAS BEEN REFLECTED IN THE LACK OF ACTIVITY BY EITHER SIDE TO EXPLOIT THE OIL RESOURCES IN THE SENKAKU AREA.

3. CHINESE RELATIONS WITH EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES: LI SAID THAT HUNGARY AND POLAND HAVE GIVEN LESS NEGATIVE ANSWERS THAN EAST GERMANY, BULGARIA AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA TO A CHINESE PROPOSAL TO BETTER RELATIONS. HE REMARKED THAT THE LEADERS OF EACH ONE OF THESE COUNTRIES DESIRE BETTER RELATIONS WITH CHINA "IN THEIR HEARTS", BUT THE SOVIET UNION PREVENTS THEM FROM MOVING IN THIS DIRECTION. LI RECALLED THAT, WHEN SERVING AS PRC CHARGE IN PRAGUE IN

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THE EARLY SEVENTIES', THE CHINESE AND CZECH GOVERNMENTS AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO A STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM. HOWEVER, THE CZECH MFA OFFICIAL HANDLING CHINA RELUCTANTLY CALLED LI IN TO INFORM HIM THAT THE PROGRAM

WOULD HAVE TO BE CANCELLED. THE CZECHS HAD NOTIFIED THE SOVIETS ABOUT THE PROGRAM, LI SAID, AND THE SOVIETS VETOED IT ON THE BASIS THAT THERE IS NO SIMILAR PROGRAM BETWEEN THE SOVIET UNION AND CHINA. LI CONCLUDED THAT IF THE SOVIET UNION AND CHINA COULD GO ONE STEP FORWARD IN IMPROVING RELATIONS, THE EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WOULD GO TWO STEPS. UNFORTUNATELY, HE LAUGHED, THE SOVIETS WILL NOT EVEN GO A HALF STEP FORWARD. LI SAID THAT IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT SINO-ALBANIAN RELATIONS HAVE TAKEN A TURN FOR THE WORSE. CHINESE AID PROJECTS ARE CONTINUING IN ALBANIA BUT NO NEW AID PROJECTS ARE BEING LAUNCHED.

4. COMMENT: WE NOTE THAT LI'S REMARKS ON IL'ICHEV'S RETURN TO PEKING CLOSELY PARALLEL THE SKEPTICISM EXPRESSED BY CHINESE DIPLOMATS HERE WHEN IL'ICHEV LAST WENT TO PEKING (REF A). WE DOUBT THAT IL'ICHEV WILL BE OFFERING SIGNIFICANT NEW PROPOSALS OR THAT HIS POSITION WILL DEPART FROM THE BASIC SOVIET STAND THAT "WE WANT AN IMPROVEMENT IN SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS AND A BORDER AGREEMENT BUT ONLY ON PROPER (OUR) TERMS." THESE CONCLUSIONS ARE UNDERLINED BY PRAVDA'S AUTHORITATIVE APRIL 1 RESTATEMENT OF THE SOVIET UNION'S UNYIELDING POSITION ON THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER PROBLEM; SOVIET MFA KAPITSA'S RECENT PESSIMISTIC PROGNOSIS FOR SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS (REF C); THE ONGOING AND INTENSIVE ANTI-CHINESE PROPAGANDA BLASTS IN THE SOVIET MEDIA (REITERATED MOST RECENTLY IN APRIL 25 SOVIET-CUBAN COMMUNIQUE REPORTED SEPTTEL); AND RECENT CHINESE STATEMENTS, ECHOED BY LI PARA 2, THAT THE PRC INTENDS TO STAND BY ITS INSISTENCE THAT THE SOVIETS RECOGNIZE AND WITHDRAW TROOPS FROM THE "DISPUTED AREAS".

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5. WHAT THEN ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS FOR MOSCOW IN

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ICA-11 ACDA-12 OES-07 DLOS-09 EB-08 AID-05 TRSE-00
OMB-01 AF-10 /141 W

-----051726 252026Z /50

P 251935Z APR 78

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0983

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AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

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SENDING IL'ICHEV TO PEKING? WE WOULD LIST THEM AS
FOLLOWS:

--WE FEEL THAT SOVIET POLICY MAKERS (LIKE
EVERYONE ELSE) HAVE VERY LITTLE IF ANY SOUND KNOWLEDGE
ABOUT POSSIBLE PRO-SOVIET OR ANTI-SOVIET SENTIMENT IN
THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP. MOSCOW IS AWARE HOWEVER, THAT
DIVISIONS DO EXIST IN THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP. IT IS
VERY LIKELY THAT THE SOVIETS MAY FEEL THAT A SOVIET
INITIATED RESUMPTION OF THE BORDER TALKS, LIKE THE RECENT
SUPREME SOVIET "INITIATIVE", COULD POSSIBLY BUTRESS
ANY SENTIMENT FOR IMPROVED SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS THAT
MAY EXIST IN THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP WHILE, AT THE SAME
TIME, POSSIBLY UNDERCUTTING THE ARGUMENTS OF THE

ANTI-SOVIET HARDLINERS. THE SOVIETS MAY ALSO BE USING ANOTHER ONE OF IL'ICHEV'S PERIODIC VISITS AS A MECHANICAL DEVICE TO PROBE FOR NEW INFORMATION IN HIS HIGH LEVEL MEETINGS WITH THE CHINESE AND "TO KEEP THE LINES OPEN" TO THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP.

--HOWEVER FORMALISTIC AND HOLLOW, MOSCOW MAY WANT TO RESUME ITS BORDER "DIALOGUE" WITH PEKING AS A "MESSAGE" TO OTHER POWERS THAT IMPROVED SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS CANNOT BE ALTOGETHER RULED OUT AND THAT THE WEST, THEREFORE, CANNOT BE CONFIDENT ABOUT ITS ABILITY TO USE THE SINO-SOVIET DISPUTE AS A LEVER AGAINST THE SOVIET UNION. CONTINUING STRAINED US-SOVIET RELATIONS REINFORCED BY THE LACK OF A SALT AGREEMENT AND SOVIET ACTIONS IN AFRICA, AS WELL AS THE BLATENT EFFORTS BY CHINA TO CHAMPION A WORLD WIDE ANTI-SOVIET FRONT MAY HAVE INCREASED THE IMPORTANCE MOSCOW ATTACHES TO THIS CONSIDERATION.

--MOSCOW COULD SEE IL'ICHEV'S VISIT AS A POSSIBLE RETARDENT TO THE WORSENING TREND IN SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS.
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THE SOVIETS MAY HOPE THAT THE IL'ICHEV VISIT WILL (USING KAPITSA'S RECENT PHRASE) TAKE THE "HEAT" OUT OF SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS AND GIVE SOME PAUSE TO THE MOUNTING INTENSITY OF SINO-SOVIET MUTUAL PUBLIC RECRIMINATIONS.

IN SUM, FROM THIS VANTAGE POINT, ALL EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE PROBABLY SENT IL'ICHEV TO PEKING WITH THESE POSSIBLE "BENEFITS" IN MIND, RATHER THAN OUT OF ANY GENUINE EXPECTATION THAT HIS BRIEF WILL LEAD TO SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN SOLVING THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER DISPUTE. TOON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION, VISITS, POLITICAL LEADERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 25 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MOSCOW08967
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780177-0191
Format: TEL
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780420/aaaaaqjo.tel
Line Count: 368
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: bf0649a8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 MOSCOW 19075, 78 PEKING 1114, 78 MOSCOW 6302, 78 MOSCOW 8568
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 06 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2859708
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS
TAGS: PBOR, PEPR, CH, UR
To: STATE USSALTTWO
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/bf0649a8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014